

## Measuring EFL Students' and Teachers' Perceptions towards Blended Learning: Case of Second Year Undergraduate Students at Djillali Liabes University, SidiBel Abbes

قياس تصورات الطلاب والمعلمين في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول التعلم المدمج: حالة طلاب السنة الثانية الجامعية في

جامعة جيلالي ليابس ، سيدي بلعباس

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### Abstract:

The struggle against the Covid 19 pandemic has increasingly affected the global learning outcomes. This study aims to outline how Algerian EFL students perceive Blended learning opportunities and how exposure to e-learning platforms can affect their academic performance. The study is also an attempt to elicit information about the obstacles encountered when implementing blended learning and explore whether the fluctuation between e-learning and face to face learning represent a hindrance or a satisfaction. The investigation is led through an attitude questionnaire addressed to second year EFL students at DjillaliLiabes University of SidiBel Abbes. The struggle against the Covid 19 pandemic has increasingly affected the global learning outcomes. This study aims to outline how Algerian EFL students perceive Blended learning opportunities and how exposure to e-learning platforms can affect their academic performance. The study is also an attempt to elicit information about the obstacles encountered when implementing blended learning and explore whether the fluctuation between e-learning and face to face learning represent a hindrance or a satisfaction. The investigation is led through an attitude questionnaire addressed to second year EFL students at DjillaliLiabes University of SidiBel Abbes. Then, interviews with teachers who used e-learning platforms are gathered to measure their feedback and their ability to mix between both contexts. The results indicate that students hold mixed attitudes towards blended learning and teachers who are used to traditional methods struggle to use platforms.

Furthermore, the analysis of data reveal that the adaptation of blended learning in an Algerian EFL context needs significant efforts to change students' perception and teachers' perceptions and teachers' practices to create a balance between e-learning and classroom instruction.

**Keywords:** bended learning, e-learning, feedback, mehods, perception.

ملخص:

اثرت مكافحة جائحة كورونا بشكل متزايد على التعلم العالمي. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد كيفية إدراك الطلاب الجزائريين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من حيث التعلم المدمج او الفرص المتاحة وكيف يمكن أن يؤثر التعرض لمنصات التعلم الإلكتروني على نتائجهم وتقدمهم الأكاديمي و أدائهم بالدراسة هي أيضاً محاولة لاستنباط معلومات حول المعوقات التي تمت مصادفتها عند تنفيذ التعلم المدمج واستكشاف ما إذا كان التقلب بين التعلم الإلكتروني والإلكتروني والتعلم وجها لوجه يمثل عائقاً أو رضا يتم إجراء التحقيق من خلال استبيان حول المواقف الموجه إلى طلاب السنة الثانية من اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة جلاي لياس بسيدي بلعباس. ثم ، مقابلات مع المعلمين الذين استخدموا التعليم الإلكتروني الكترولونيكروني حيث يتم تجميع منصات التعلم لقياس ملاحظاتهم وقدرتهم على التعلم المختلط في كلا السياقين. تشير النتائج إلى أن الطلاب لديهم مواقف مختلطة تجاه التعلم المدمج والمعلمين الذين اعتادوا على الأساليب التقليدية يكفحون لاستخدام المنصات. علاوة على ذلك يكشف تحليل البيانات أن تكييف التعلم المدمج في سياق اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجزائر يحتاج إلى جهود كبيرة لتغيير تصورات الطلاب وممارسات المعلمين لإنشاء التوازن بين التعلم الإلكتروني والتعليم في الفصول الدراسية.

كلمات مفتاحية:

التعلم المدمج، التعلم الإلكتروني، التفاعل، الأساليب، الإدراك.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning is an important process that requires a countless hardworking with a great motivation and autonomy in a positive environment. It also necessitates extensive practice and without this blend English learning would not be up-and-coming and reach its fruitfulness. The last two years have witnessed the contagious pandemic Corona virus (COVID-19) which has impacted institutions of higher education by their cloture so as to avoid infection risks. The current situation has put learning in a critical stage (Dhawan, 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020). Therefore, the challenges met when applying blended learning opportunities have been largely debated.

Overall this review paper puts an emphasis on examining EFL students' perceptions about the use of traditional and e learning methods. Although blended learning is an important factor to cope with the pandemic challenges, there are some obstacles and issues expressed by both teachers

and learners. Thus, it is perhaps worth exploring what hinders the learning process and highlight these obstacles so that the opportunity of blended learning will not be lost.

Through the contact made with EFL teachers and learners and the observation in the EFL context, it has been noticed that the common problem in using blended learning is the teachers' and learners uneasiness when using technology, this problem might be referred to the absence of training of both pre-service and in service teachers and the non-mastery of platforms and e-learning skills.

Since this work outlines students' perceptions and their practices at DjillaliLiabes University, it addresses some inquiries about its feasibility and usefulness:

- To what extent is blended learning efficient in the Algerian EFL university context?
- How do EFL students and teachers perceive this opportunity?

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1. An Overview about Blended Learning**

The last few years have witnessed the use of blended learning as a strategy to reinforce face to face learning and to improve the quality of education. Researchers have provided different definitions. However, a general definition refers to the integration of online teaching and learning methods with face to face methods (Kosar, 2016). Throne (2003) defines blended learning as an opportunity to facilitate the obstacles of learning as it provides the different techniques brought within the technological advance. In so doing, this can enable the learner to take advantage of both face to face learning and online learners. However, students in the Algerian university context still challenge their needs and competences.

Regarding the importance of using blended learning, Graham et al (2005) indicate that practitioners use blended learning to improve their pedagogical practices, and increase flexibility and enhance “cost effectiveness” (as cited in Graham ,2006;p.8) . Moreover, Graham adds that blended learning contributes to challenge the time constraints as it can help

to offer lessons and courses at anytime and anywhere and therefore this will results in creating a balance in the course delivery.

Moreover, within the progress of the use of web based platforms, different instructions have been developed with blended learning namely e learning and distance learning online learning. Yet, it should be noted that difference occurs between them. To begin with distance learning, Greenberg (1998) defines it as a planned teaching/learning process that uses different technologies to address learners at a distance and is planned for helping learners' interaction and certification in their learning process. Then, E-learning is more focused as it limits the learning materials and objectives, it is more structured by building learners' knowledge and skills, and more useful as it focuses the continuity of the learning process. As a consequence, blended learning covers the different types of learning as indicated by Singh and Reed (2001) that it appears to make use of all the positive sides of both environments.

### **1.2. Blended Learning during the Pandemic**

Lately, the call and fame of Blended Learning in higher education has enlarged due to education crisis of the COVID-19 (Wen e al, 2020). Blended learning combines both presence and online instruction. The balance and implementation of these components depends on the flexibility of both learners and teachers. FernándezBatanero et al (2021) indicate that the progress of technology and innovations, Blended learning now is becoming a trend in the educational sector. Many studies favour the use of blended learning, as it contributes to decrease the harm gained during covid19. (Barbour et al., [2020](#); Crompton et al., [2021](#); Hodges et al., [2020](#)), and how to deal with lockdown of institutions as (Bond, [2020](#); Bond et al., [2021](#); Short et al., [2021](#); Viner et al., [2020](#)). Therefore, the last two years represent a challenge area for university staff, students, and teachers. Yet, the pandemic uncertainty regarding the possibility to return or stay under online learning is unforgettable (Dorn et al., 2020).

The efficiency of face-to-face class and online class has always been debated by many practitioners and educators (Garrison, 2008) as it is possible to supply both traditional and new technological methods (Sayers et al, 2004). Currently, both presence and online learning have advantages

and disadvantages. (Driscoll, 2002; Boyle, et al., 2003; Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004).

To what regards the EFL context, Blended learning has been integrated as one of the most remarkable educational trends (Halverson et al, 2014). Research investigated in EFL contexts shows that learners' perceptions about the blended learning opportunity varied according to the different language skills (Bueno-Alastuey & López-Pérez, 2014). Ayres (2002) argues that online tools can help learners in their spelling and grammar progress. Similarly, Byrne (2007) found that Blended learning is specifically useful in developing writing skills, Lee and Chong (2007) added that web-based materials positively impact vocabulary and listening skills development. Yet, more literature on functional effectiveness of blended learning need to be explored approaches so that to explain how to implement it.

## **2. Methodology**

### **3.1. Sampling, Instrumentation and data Collection Procedures**

Initially, the current research perspective seeks to overview EFL students' perceptions and challenges during the Covid 19 through blended learning. This study was realized during the integration of blended learning during the crisis. The population addressed in this study is 111 undergraduate students at the English department SidiBelabess University (76.4% females and 23.6 males). The research tools used in this investigation are an attitude questionnaire and a field work observation. The questionnaire aims to see how students cope with blended learning situation and the observation is used to ensure the collection of more valid data and outline how teachers perceive students' interaction and their autonomy.

The questionnaire contains 12 questions divided into three sections. Questions about perspectives, obstacles and practices are administered to find answers to the research questions and suggest solutions to better the experience of blended learning. Correspondingly; both the questionnaire and the interview have been adapted to the existing literature. In that, the first section entitled "attitudes and perceptions" examines how participants view the newly introduced experience of blended learning during the

pandemic. The second section of the questionnaire included four questions addressed to check students' challenges and what hinders their interaction and autonomy with blended learning. The last section shifts attention towards classroom practices and learners' interaction within platforms and online activities.

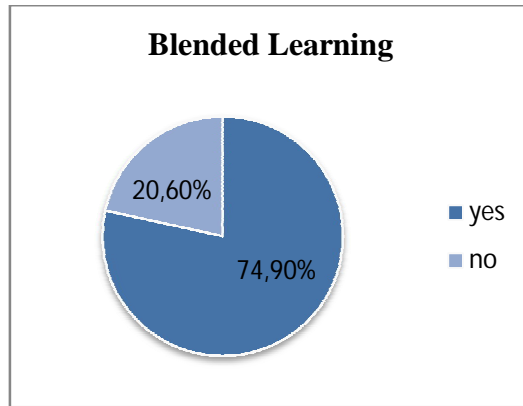
As far as the observation is concerned, it turns around investigating teachers' background and their mastery of MOODLE PLATFORMS and Google meet lectures, it also targets teachers' practices on to relate face to face learning to online learning as well as the ability to adopt the module content with the virtual learning environment.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

As mentioned before, the aim of this paper is to explore the attitudes towards blended learning and also to shed light on students' and teachers practices within this integration. Another aim within this study is to overview teachers' perceptions as they constitute an important element in the learning process. The data collected by the questionnaire have revealed information about students' profile. As mentioned before, the total number of participants are 111 respondents including 76.4% females and 23.6% males. In order to answer the addressed research questions, the questionnaire data is analysed and discussed in the next section.

#### **3.1. Students' Questionnaire Results**

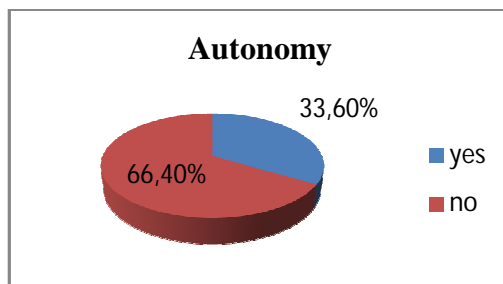
Initially, students were asked whether they had experienced blended learning during the pandemic. The totality of the participants expressed that they experienced blended learning in the class with percentage of 79.4 % while 20.6% of them did not. Indeed, the majority of universities have chosen blended learning as a way of teaching during coronavirus crisis and some institutions used only online learning to stop the spread of contaminations by face to face learning.



**Graph 1:** The Use of Blended Learning

Then, respondents were asked about challenges they face with blended learning, different issues were pointed out by students regarding the blended learning mainly in an online classroom context. Some pedagogical problems were faced by 41.4% students during lectures, 27% of the informants stated that they had struggled with both online and face to face learning. Moreover, the Lack of lessons and teaching hours was noticed by of them while others found no problem. Also, other issues are raised such as Time constraints, learning materials availability like computer and internet speed. Furthermore, none of issues were figured out by 9% of students. Yet, some participants indicated that the reception of several pdf files have made them responsible of their own learning and others stated that this had affected their classroom interaction. What is more, most students' answers with a percentage of 46 % were fluctuating between Internet issues technical problems while accessing to platforms. Another question was asked about whether there is a balance between e-learning and face to face in their university context. The totality of 75.5% stated that there was a balance between online learning and face to face learning in their institution while 24.5% percentage had denied the existence of balance between the both methods . Learners claimed that contrary to online learning, face to face learning is an opportunity where they ask and directly get answers to their questions. In fact, it should be admitted that the classroom interaction is more efficient as there is a direct connection between the learner and the teacher, which makes it

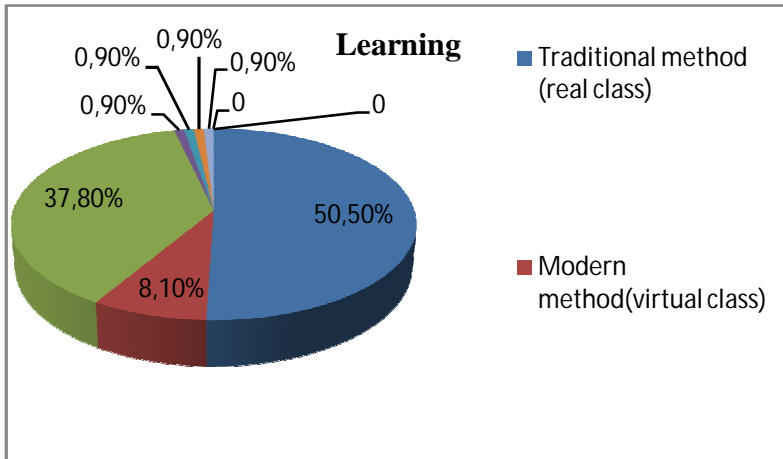
easier to receive information. In this perspective, Face to face learning seems to be more effective while e-learning is still a source of frustration for the majority of EFL students. Furthermore, the lessons are uploaded in the right time and once students are in class they recall with the teacher what they have been taught in the platform. It obviously defers in the way of grasping the information; the teacher can make it easy for students to understand while most of them take their time in understanding the written form mainly with structures that have ambiguous meaning. It can be deduced that Face to face learning is more productive and it is pretty self-explanatory. Students do not get e-learning lessons owing to the lack of computer skills and technical challenges. Generally, the data gathered from this question reveal that students believe that studying online is difficult due to the lack of guidance. Yet, they think that the intensive face to face courses make the lessons on the platform easier to grasp. The next question addresses possibility to work on groups via the platform. Most of the respondents 61.3% indicated that it was impossible to work in groups while only 33.3 % said they had been able to do it. Students stated that the nature of the module can decide about our working methods and that most activities on the platform are provided on PDF format. In fact, exchanging ideas when students are online is a difficult task due to the connection flow constraints which makes it hard undertake a decent conversation. Additionally, students were asked whether e-learning affected their autonomy. Overall, 66.4% stated that their autonomy is not affected while only 33.6% said that they had become less autonomous. This may be related to the familiarity and use of computer science skills.



**Graph 2:** Blended learning and autonomy



When respondents were asked about the method they prefer after experiencing blended learning, half of the participants prefer the traditional method with 50.5% percentage. 37.8% of them stated that they prefer the use of both while 8.1% of them prefer modern method (virtual class). Some of them claimed that it depends on the learning situation. Indeed, one can say that both learning methods can be efficient if the online method (modern) is more developed.



**Graph 3:** Learning Preferences

The majority of students are aware of the various opportunities they can have through online platform use. Some respondents stated that the online activities offer various interesting visual tools like pictures and videos that support their study content. Yet, they still prefer face-to-face over online learning instruction owing to the direct interaction with teachers. Another factor raised by students is their preference for studying on printed papers rather than e-modules. They regard reading printed more efficient than the digital version. This is stated by Woody, Daniel, and Baker's (2010) who see that students prefer print to digital books. In the same line Miller, Nutting, and Baker-Eveleth's (2013) state that despite the fact that university students feel comfortable with digital ICT tools, they still prefer printed papers. The students' preference for the face-to-face assessment is another factor determining their blended EFL implementation. They believed that face-to-face peering during tests and

exams can help them to overcome some mistakes and misunderstanding. They stated that online quizzes and exams were somehow difficult for them when reflecting what they had learned.

Generally, students' attitudes towards blended learning are mixed, some of them manifested a positive attitude about their blended learning process, and the others find it a motivating but yet difficult to manage. This indicates that the degree of satisfaction is conditioned by the way blended learning is introduced in their educational environment. Besides, the crisis has pushed both practitioners and learners to accept the fusion of both learning process instead of using them separately. Then, students agree that the lack of peering is an important factor that determines their mastery of the online learning. The findings also reveal that EFL learners at SidiBelabess University are exploring a new learning environment that fluctuates between traditional classroom learning and virtual interaction. Some important points should be considered by both teachers and students:

- Interaction should be made by both elements in the online courses; the teacher transmits a message and receives one in return by the learner.
- Online courses should not make learners passive recipients who absorb the information without giving any feedback.
- Reinforcement of the face to face learning through the online tasks so that students do not feel a dramatic difference between both trends.
- Training is an important factor that should be undertaken by our universities to overcome barriers of misuse and non mastery.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study reveals that blended learning mixes both online and traditional processes that can be integrated usefully for enhancing EFL learning Opportunities. Flexibility is one of the virtues that this learning trend can offer. Algerian EFL Learners should be aware that the mastery of this opportunity will lead to effective academic advance. Additionally, this research highlights that EFL learners and perceptions toward the use of

blended learning approach hold mixed attitudes due to the way of its implementation.

Interestingly, the current study also raises an important point related to the activities and instructions used in the blended EFL courses. These activities should be varied and the online tasks should complement the face to face instructional techniques, this could be deduced from respondents' answers about the obstacles found. Therefore, adjusting the online teaching techniques within the classroom practices would increase their learning motivation and facilitate their mastery of the studied material. Finally, because this study is realized only with students from one department, the findings can not be generalized. Other investigations may raise more obstacles for the integration of blended learning approach in the EFL university context that needs to be explored through further studies. A future study that can include other students from various departments needs to be carried out to obtain more valid and general results.

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